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JAMES EARL RAY VIDEOTAPES RESTORED/CONVERTED

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The Shelby County Register's office has converted several reels of video tape related to the James Earl Ray prosecution to a digital medium. These video tapes were discovered in material obtained by the Shelby County Register/Archives Office from the Shelby County Sheriff's Office. The material includes video of James Earl Ray upon his return to Memphis, Tennessee to face trial for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1968, the Shelby County Sheriff's Office purchased a Sony Videocorder and Video Camera for the purposes of documenting the extradition, incarceration and prosecution of James Earl Ray. It is believed that the personnel using the equipment were learning how to operate this technology "on the fly." As a result, the footage is not always as clear as we are accustomed to seeing today. Additional lighting is not used on most of the recordings. Audio portions are not always clear in the footage. There are inconsistencies in the video and audio tracks throughout the converted footage. Because tapes were reused, previously recorded audio and video tracks sometimes "bleed through" to the final recording.

Possibly the most exciting tape is titled "James Earl Ray Arrival on Plane, July 19, 1968." In it, Bill Morris boards the plane on which the FBI returned Ray to Memphis and reads him his rights at 1:49. The tape further shows Ray's arrival at the Shelby County Jail, where he was searched, examined by a doctor, and put into a cell at 3:18.

On the tape titled, "TV Report with William Bradford Huie, February 6, 1969," there are commercials for Carnation, found at 1:10, Friskies, found at 1:15, Dixie Lily Flour, at 2:44, and even television shows like Search for Tomorrow, at 2:22, and a local WREG News report with Jim Hutchinson, at 3:56. This material is there because the Sheriff's office recorded an interview with William B. Huie. Huie was a prominent

journalist and author in his day, having covered several Civil Rights stories in the 1950s and 1960s for popular periodicals. Ray sold his story to Huie, who eventually wrote the book *He Slew the Dreamer* in 1970. During the television interview, Huie was asked his opinion on whether Ray acted alone or as part of an organized conspiracy at 6:40. He also described Ray on the tape at 7:40 as a “man [who] has spent 13 years of his life in prison. He has practiced deception all of his life.” According to Huie, evidence available at the time indicated that Ray had some assistance at 9:13.

Everyone entering the courtroom on various trial days was required to be videotaped, stating their name and position. John Ray and Jerry Ray are seen entering the courtroom in “James Earl Ray Guilty Plea, Court Attendees, March 10, 1969” at 6:54, as are witnesses like Samuel Billy Kyles, on the tape at 15:32. Local figures like then Sheriff William N. Morris appear on the “James Earl Ray Guilty Plea, Court Attendees, March 10, 1969” tape at 16:42, A.C. Gilless (who later became Shelby County Sheriff) on the “James Earl Ray Request for New Council 1, Court Attendees November 12, 1968” tape at 5:14. Then Chief Deputy Roy C. Nixon (who later served as Sheriff and then Shelby County Mayor) appears in “James Earl Ray Court Proceedings, Court Attendees September 30, 1968” at 15:28.

Also making an appearance is prosecuting attorney Robert K. Dwyer, who appears on the “James Earl Ray Request for New Council 2, Court Attendees November 12, 1968” tape at 21:15. He compares himself to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., on the “James Earl Ray Court Proceedings, Court Attendees January 17, 1969” tape at 3:40. Defense attorneys Arthur J. Haines, Jr. and Arthur J. Haines appear on the “James Earl Ray Court Proceedings, Court Attendees September 30, 1968” at 10:23.

More importantly for historians is a glimpse of the makeup of Ray’s jury as they are seen entering the courtroom on the “James Earl Ray Guilty Plea, Court Attendees March 10, 1969” tape at 16:58. The jury was all male, with only two black jurors.

“This is an opportunity to preserve and bring to the public intriguing images of a critical piece of our nation’s history,” said Register Tom Leatherwood.